Psytrance
An Introduction

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In 2008, I travelled to Boom, the tenth anniversary of the biennial Portuguese psytrance and alternative culture festival operated by Good Mood Productions on Lake Idanha-a-Nova in the Castelo Branco district to the east of the country's Centro region. During that week, my second consecutive visit to Boom, I shared one of the world's largest electronic music dance floors with habitués holding passports from over eighty countries (in excess of 40,000 people). This festal massive is symptomatic of an intriguing transnationalism in music culture. As the premier event in the global psychedelic trance (or psytrance) calendar, Boom is connected to a wider industry of music production and performance, independent labels, micro media and event-management organisations, communities of visual, sound and healing artists, and seasonal networks of local parties and regional festivals held in dozens of countries. Like Boom, many of these events carry a pattern of cultural, musical and stylistic integration that has come to characterise psytrance, an electronic dance music culture (EDMC) that evinces a fusional integrity and paradoxical disposition downstream from its much vaunted, and yet often maligned, site of becoming—beaches and hinterlands to the north of the former Portuguese province of Goa, which was annexed by India in 1961.

This complexity is indeed integral to the counterculture in which psytrance is rooted, a counterculture whose ecstatic and conscious impulses shape its proliferation and mutation in the present. Yet, efforts to produce tight definitions of psytrance (often by way of untreated and unclarified concepts like "scene", "neotribe", "subculture", "genre", "counterculture", "spirituality" and "religion") meet with peril, in no small part due to its sophisticated cultural and musical roots, shimmering aesthetics, and a broadening transnationalism. That psytrance constitutes a shifting sonic quilt of genre influences as well as a diversity of national/regional populations and scenes in which recognisable sounds have emerged, or distinct fusions formed, has not been well understood by researchers. We need look no further than Boom to find evidence of this musical and social diversity. Over four dance floors, event-goers are exposed to various genres, or subgenres, available on the "psytrance" palette. These include "progressive psychedelic", "full on", "dark", "spugedelic", "psybreaks" along with

"electro" (electronic funk), ambient or "psybient" styles (including "psydub"), "trance fusion" bands (electronic and acoustic fusions) and traditional "trance" acts (playing djembe, gamelan or didjeridu, for example). Many of these acts attract enthusiasts who are dedicated fans of specific styles and who will attend events in domestic regions throughout the year becoming members of metropolitan, regional, national, or continental "psy" communities. Some styles have emerged or taken root in specific world locations—thus "soumi", or "Suomisaundi" (and also "spugadelic", a freeform sound originating from Finland) and dark trance (or "darkpsy", a fast and dark style with industrial and gothic horror sensibilities originating in Germany and Russia). Enthusiasts from a multitude of cities and regions make pilgrimages to Boom to become immersed in the identifiable timbral aesthetics of their obsession.

But there is another strong motivation—participants are enthused to become *exposed to difference*. Festival culture illustrates a heterotopic, carnivalesque and synesthetic context in which participants may upgrade or retrograde their selves through national "flavours", sonic "colours" and other available techniques of the self (e.g., drugs, dance, textile fashion, piercings, hair styling, tattooing, alternative diets, etc.). Indeed this interest expressed by Boom participants is consistent with a disposition towards difference within psytrance more generally. Though not without contradiction, this ideal forms part of an "alternative" repertoire that distinguishes psytrance from so-called "commercial trance", or that which is more commonly identified in the global marketplace as "trance" (with the associated labels of "progressive trance", "hard trance" or "Euro trance"),[1] the distinction from which is embodied in the difference participants often make between "travellers" and "tourists". If a festival is, as Erik Davis suggests (2008), a cultural "petri-dish", then psytrance festivals are cross-fertilised seedbeds, ecologies of sound in which multitudinous styles coexist, sonicities where enthusiasts, with sensibilities already shaped by different genres, are exposed to ever-newer combinations and become accomplices in aesthetic fronts, willing instruments "played" by artists, perhaps even becoming "new humans" engineered by electronics.[2] While larger music festivals possess this potential, the events that carry a *free* pretention are sites where such rhizomatic cross-fertilisation seems likeliest. That is, the festival which is not necessarily "free" of charge, for most contemporary psytrance events possess entrance fees, but which are temporary contexts that permit habitués freedoms from a host of trenchant (regulatory and repressive) circumstances in the life-world, and from the interventions of authorities ("cops"), outsiders ("tourists") and conventions ("cheese") that may otherwise actualise the reach of the "mainstream" into the *free space* of the event. This is the "underground" socio-sonic aesthetic so often articulated and defended as "the vibe" (see Taylor 2001: ch. 8; St John 2009a). And while its "underground" status is perennially contested, an immediate and relatively autonomous space enables habitués freedoms to sample from

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and experiment with alternative modes of thinking, acting and being—and concomitantly to experiment with new and different styles of music. This is not to argue that a completely "free party" is possible, for, as participants routinely insist, elements continually jeopardise the party vibe, and producers, designers, and habitués continue to rail against agents of predation (sexual, commercial and governmental) with the goal of optimising and re-optimising the psytrance experience.

The history of such optimisations is complex, though most agree that it is rooted in "full moon parties" held on Anjuna beach in Goa in the 1970s and 1980s and incubated within "Goa trance" scenes flourishing around the world from the mid-1990s, after which it developed as "psytrance". Sharing music production technologies and DJ techniques with EDM scenes psytrance would develop distinct sonic and visual aesthetics. By 2010, psytrance music, style and textile fashions have become evident in scenes the world over, with the music and culture translated among populations across Europe, in Israel, North America, Australasia, South Africa, South America, Mexico, Japan, and elsewhere. This cultural proliferation has been dependent upon the growth of exotic sites of travel, exchange and performance (e.g., Goa, Koh Phangan in Thailand, Bahia in Brazil and Bali); cosmopolitan centres (e.g., London, San Francisco, Tel Aviv, Hamburg, Melbourne, Tokyo, Johannesburg, Sao Paulo); the emergence of the Internet (enabling forums, blogging, networking platforms, p2p fileshare, netlabels, etc); and a vast network of underground urban and open-air events and larger dance festivals infused with the "Goa vibe", a psychedelic aesthetic transposed from Goa and inflected through these exotic sites, cosmopolitan centres and cyber-domains.

The psychedelic character of the psytrance festival (and its culture) should be recognised as critical to understanding its fluidity of genre, scene and style. Although cardinal to its emergence, this is not simply a matter of LSD, though consciousness alteration is foundational to psytrance (and LSD has been one of the chief tools adopted to this end). Alongside a host of psychoactive substances besides LSD, various methods of consciousness alteration have long been adopted within alternative cultural and spiritual movements. Mid-west US party network, Chilluminati, express this awareness, partly in efforts to counter standard prejudicial reflexes to the word "psychedelic". While recognising that the term was first coined by Humphrey Osmond in a letter to Aldous Huxley in 1956, after which it would be applied to consciousness altering substances such as mescaline and LSD, Chilluminati state: "fifty years later we still use the term 'psychedelic', but in a much broader sense. We refer to as psychedelic anything having the effect of transforming our mode of consciousness. We embrace every such legal technique which includes dance, music, techniques involving light and sound, sensory deprivation, breath control, exercise, fasting, art, meditation, prayer, sex, and yoga".[3] Arun Saldanha also addresses what he calls "psychedelic practices of self" in his research on Goa trance, *Psychedelic White* (2007: 13), though

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his strong association between "psychedelic" and "whiteness" overlooks the significance of Afrodiasporic artists in the electronic music legacy to which psytrance is greatly indebted (see St John 2010a). The investigation of a *psychedelic aesthetic* is necessarily integral to the study of psytrance, however, as it is to earlier and ongoing music cultures (e.g., Bromell 2000), and in this volume contributors open up important discussions on trance culture, genre, technology, ritual and *psychedelicisation*.

CONCEPTUALISING PSYTRANCE

These discussions should assist the development of heuristics around which psytrance (and other EDMCs) can be properly addressed. While prominent in the theoretical toolkit inherited by youth and popular music culture researchers, for some time now researchers have, with varying rationales, challenged "subculture" (associated with the Birmingham Center for Contemporary and Cultural Studies) as a perspective suited to the study of music cultures. For example, in a systematic rebuke of one-dimensional and hermetically sealed structuralisms, along with post-modernist or "postsubcultural" accounts thought to pass over the actual experience of youth, Dan Laughey (2006) offers an interactionist study of the "everyday cultures of music and youth". In another approach, David Hesmondalgh (2005) argues that music is not the privileged domain

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Figure I.1 DJ Tristan at Boom Festival 2008, Portugal. Photo by Alex Canazei: www.alexcanazei.com

of young people as received heuristics (like "subculture", or indeed Laughey's alternative) readily assume. The position is instructive since, as a music culture, psytrance retains enthusiasts into their twenties, thirties, forties and older, a complication which also poses a challenge to standard "youth" and "adulthood" classifications. Others have conveyed that producers and participants in EDMCs and other music cultures are networked across sites, oscillate between nodes of identification, accumulate and shed multiple stylistic influences, with such fluidities constituting the "neotribal" present of participants. The amorphous quality to the shape of participant behaviour within EDM scenes is illustrated by Andy Bennett (1999) in his study of the urban dance music scene in Newcastle upon Tyne in north-east England, where clubbers were observed to sample from diverse musical genres and visual styles in a fashion analogous to the digital compositional techniques employed by the music's producers. The observation that clubbers, inheriting the eclectic consumption sensibilities of post-WWII "style tribes", become involved with "a series of fragmented, temporal experiences as they move between different dance floors and engage with different crowds" (Bennett 1999: 611), resembles the fluidity of identity formation within psytrance. Indeed the *psychedelic* aesthetic of psytrance music culture almost guarantees that identities reliant on rigid stylistic preferences of the kind articulated by "subculture" theorists will be subject to liquidation. Furthermore, that psytrancers are communities of "users" of technics (technologies and techniques) demands the search for suitable hermeneutics.

Fluidity may be the modus operandi of clubbing crowds but, as indicated, it is also characteristic of production, a characteristic that psytrance shares with other EDMs, where producers often hold down or pass between multiple artistic identities, which, in some cases, obtains rather bewildering proportions as in the fifty-plus aliases that shapeshifter Jake Stephenson (most commonly known as Shamanic Tribes on Acid) produced under in less than ten years.[4] Sometimes artists will undertake incremental and other times dramatic shifts in musical direction, associated with new aliases, and in such fashion they produce special versions of themselves, iterations evoking the dub-plate "versions" first produced by Jamaican sound engineers, thereby generating shifting sonic-personalities tested out on the dance floor. Circulating in a climate of independence, self-management and flexibility, taking advantage of the rapid developments in audio production hardware, digital audio software, virtual instrumentation, and, thus, home studios, by contrast with the managed multi-member band format, artists collaborate in multiple music projects—often simultaneously, as is the case with Simon Posford (aka Hallucinogen) who has been a member of Shpongle, Younger Brother and nearly thirty other acts. These practices enable artists to maintain different sonic identities in various regions, or even over one club night, according to varying audience preferences, enabling longevity within rapidly changing climates of taste.

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Such malleability is most clearly apparent within EDMCs, and arguably most apparent within psytrance, which has shared its evolution with that of the Internet—no small consideration given the networked and computer mediated lifestyles of its producers and participants. Early Goa trance tracks anticipate the coming proliferation of "virtual reality". Thus the first release from Goa legends The Infinity Project was infused with excited anticipation: "Virtual Reality Is Here" (B-side of the 12-inch *Hyper-Active*, Atmosphere Records, 1991). And, in the valorisation of "cyberspace", these sonic cheer squads were also celebrating the *virtual worlds* of Goa parties (especially those in Goa) which they would seek to reproduce harnessing an evolving ensemble of cyber and audio-visual technologies. Within Goa trance, as with other EDM developments, cybernetic mediation enabling the distribution of music was immediately embraced as a means of maintaining artistic independence. Thus in 1997, just hours after completing their first track, psytrance duo Analog Pussy, made it available as a free MP3 (releasing their first full album, *MP3 Release 01*, through that means in 1999).

From early use.net groups to social networking platforms, the Internet would, furthermore, be adopted as a tool to re/produce the party space. Attention to stylistic malleability, transnational fluidity and participant networking skills should, therefore, not be taken to mean that psytrance enthusiasts are without ongoing identifications, strong patterns of sociality or shared sensibilities. And the exercising of "choice" should not be taken to infer that individuals are necessarily ticket holders for the postmodern style-orgy (Muggleton 2000), especially when consumer choice is patterned around desires for modes of independence and autonomy. Fluidity may characterise the sociality of its enthusiasts, but this does not mean that primary sites of experience, spaces of performance and wider cultural investments are without an ethos counter to dominant life-world valuations, or inconsistent with alternative cultural movement discourse and practice. While it has been widely recognised that subcultural analysis is ill-suited to these circumstances within popular music studies, especially EDMC, researchers continue to adopt "subculture" as a key heuristic, though now a "postmodern subculture". The term belongs to Greener and Hollands (2006) whose work is all the more pertinent given their exclusive attention to psytrance. Holding that existing templates are inappropriate for psytrance, Greener and Holland's study appeared amid a debate held at the *Journal of Youth Studies* between proponents of "subculture", "post-subculture" and other commentators unsatisfied with either (see Blackman 2005; Hesmondalgh 2005; Bennett 2005, Shildrick and MacDonald 2006). While psytrance is recognised to be neither localised nor specifically working class, as in CCCS subculture theory, and thus characterised not by "tight boundaries and distinctive shapes", neither is it "depthless, transitory or highly fragmented", as in the "postmodernist" theory adopted by scholars working in association with Steve Redhead (1993), since participants demonstrate,

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for instance, "common value systems and beliefs, the centrality of music, the construction of identity and community" (2006: 396). The value of this approach is that the authors seek a theoretical sophistication suited to understand that, for psytrancers around the world, "community" is maintained through face-to-face experience (at parties and festivals) *and* virtual interaction (Internet forums). But while the "permanent liminal space" of the Internet (ibid. 402) encourages the authors to experiment with heuristics of community, their depiction of a "global subcultural identity" turns out as a rather unadventurous paradigm somewhat remote from its research subjects. Greener and Hollands harvest impressive statistics (552 survey respondents belonging to some forty nationalities), to argue that the "connections between subculture members were not temporary" but "very strong—so strong that eighty per cent of respondents believed that they were part of a psytrance community" (414). The authors offer data that speaks to the significance of spirituality for participants, a welcome outcome given that the cultural studies of youth and music had long been inconsiderate to this development (see St John 2006). But while this is a departure from subculture studies, the view that identification is "strong rather than ephemeral" may offer a relief to those structuralists for whom fluid sociality is anathema to community. What appears missing in this analysis, and in the ascribed theory of a "global subcultural identity", however, is an understanding of the diversity, flows and flexibility endogenous to psytrance. The recognition of such a fluid native state is thwarted by the unfounded dismissal of theoretical perspectives, notably "neotribe" (Maffesoli 1996), which would otherwise enable the analysis. Without a lens on the cosmopolitan characteristics of this phenomenon, the approach falls short of its "global" character.

One of the appealing dimensions of the neotribal perspective is the impression afforded of the lasting sense of the miraculous character of affectual sociality within the wider tragedy of modern life; of a perduring "underground sociality" despite the neoliberalist individualism of the 1980s. In this view, upon which Bennett would strike note, individuals hold simultaneous membership in ephemeral micro-communities, the networking of which constitutes society's ambiance, a recognition germane to the study of cosmopolitan culture, the ephemeral grounds from which EDMC and its vibrant *disctopias* emerged in the 1970s (St John 2010a). Empathetic nodes of identifications are obtained and maintained through the *use* (consumption, appropriation, repurposing) of commodities, media, art, technology. "Psytrance" is a complex techno-tribalism, with many internal differences and micro-taste cultures rapidly forming, merging or falling away, and in which symbolic capital is embodied and recognised in distinct performances and displays (e.g. those associated with various psytrance subgenres). Enthusiasts oscillate between sites of aesthetic appeal, accumulating signs and expressions of identity through their enthusiasm, for example, for particular "tunes", DJs and drugs, but yet, within the context of the

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dance floor and the full broadside of its psychedelic assemblage, willingly succumb to a liquidity of the self. These processes of self-identification and dissolution are commonly deemed "tribal" by psytrance participants (see St John 2009b, 2011a). Moreover, identities are affected by many shifting influences in the life-world, and draw inspiration from multiple interests, passions and vocations (including other forms of music) as well as interwoven family, religious, and civic obligations. It is in such mobile cosmopolitan complexity that "community" can be recognised.

Thus mobility is integral to psytrance, but in a number of ways. As indicated, the fluid movement of psytrance enthusiasts requires a conceptualisation of music and lifestyle practices structuralist frameworks are unable to provide. This is all the more evident given that commitments are typically not expressions of minority or marginal race, ethnic, class or sexual identity, as is common, for example, within hip-hop. Commitments are more likely articulations of a privileged middle-class dissensus and resourceful expatriation, though not necessarily "white" as the popularity of psytrance among Japanese and Brazilian enthusiasts attests. But while higher socio-economic status enables the luxury of physical exodus to chosen sites of alternative performance and lifestyle, the *movement* of psytrance/rs is somewhat more complex. That is, they articulate the values and practices associated with social, cultural and spiritual movements, which subcultural and post-structuralist approaches have been ill-suited to handle. Research has illustrated a tendency towards the effacing of "counterculture" (and the alternative cultural and spiritual trajectories such might entail), with social movement practices often displaced from structuralist and semiotic approaches to symbolic resistance. Paul Willis (1978), for instance, rounded down hippie proclamations of transcendence to illusory practice, and more generally CCCS-influenced "subculture" research offered little to understand the cultural politics of music scenes evolving since the 1950s and 1960s. In studies of the conversion of clubber style into status (Thornton 1996) and the altered socio-sensuality of the clubbing vibe (Jackson 2004), post-CCCS researchers applied Pierre Bourdieu's work in efforts to understand how actors within EDM club scenes effectively manipulate media, symbols and sensuality to generate distinct identities and seductive worlds. While studies of "subcultural capital" and the "habitus" have offered critical insights on clubbing scenes, there is much scope for the expansion or renovation of these approaches when considering alternative "clubbing" scenes such as those associated with psytrance, where stature, distinction and affect may also be recognizably derivative from active commitments to various causes. In addition to, and perhaps by contrast with, identities produced and expressed in inscrutable pockets of cool, carnality, and in *making noise*, dance scenes also form fronts, transmit messages, and *make a noise*. Psytrance culture illustrates tendencies towards insularity and activism, cultic and conscious practice, with status converted from activities across these commitments, or indeed from the evident multiplicities and

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contradictory behaviour that a simplified reading of "subcultural capital" is unable to identify. Such studies also point out the differing character of the socio-sonic aesthetic participants know as "the vibe". While studies of clubbing variously address the revitalising, pleasurable or liberating sensibility of the EDM event (see Malbon 1999; Jackson 2004; Pini 2001), the vibe is shaped by responses to multiple social conditions, and thus is host to a range of responsibilities (see St John 2009a).

While cultural Marxist and other models have typically dismissed the activities of bohemians, freaks, expatriates, anarchists and other middle class enigmas who reek of bourgeois pretense, or unproductive escapism, the subject of countercultural mobility and the nomadic utopia has not gone unnoticed by cultural researchers. In *Vanloads of Uproarious Humanity*, Kevin Hetherington (2000) addressed something of the mobile utopia performed by alternative travellers in UK seasonal free festivals. In *Global Nomads* (2007), Anthony D'Andrea traces the "civilizational diaspora" further afield, with expressive "neo-nomads" committed to expatriation in Ibiza and Goa. Perceiving themselves as "a marginal and vanishing culture requiring countermeasures of mobility and stealth against commodification and repression", following Deleuze, these "techno-freaks" are reported to be "nomads" who "do not move" (D'Andrea 2004: 241–242). The implication is that, for psytrance enthusiasts and other "freaks" who harness an assemblage of communications media, digital arts and modes of transportation, along with holistic health practices, in the pursuit of alternative modernities, not only are specific global sites and regions liminalised as such, but the globe itself becomes a subjunctive sphere of experimentation and transition. As D'Andrea states

> These Global Nomads seek to drift away from their Western homeland, and, inspired by imaginations of a Romantic East, they asymptotically move towards a smooth, impossible space—"u-topia" by definition. By celebrating rootlessness and nomadism, global nomads shape cosmopolitan post-national identities that question the essentiality of the "local", and embrace the "global" as the new home and reference (D'Andrea 2004: 244).

These exotic bohemian enclaves in which psytrance has been implicated like Ibiza, Goa, Koh Phangan, Bahia and other locations become appealing to vacationers seeking offbeat expat realism. And this is indeed how sites are portrayed in tourist promotions whereby locales of trailblazing experimentation begin hosting high-end developments in proximity to authentic hippie *chic*, ironically evincing the exclusivism, divisiveness and elitism that dissidents initially fled. Yet, as various contributors to this book demonstrate, within transnational psytrance the "expressive expatriotism" explored in questionably "smooth spaces" off-shore have been re-imported to ignite domestic infernos. And while the development of psytrance in

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regions globally cannot be observed in the absence of the recognition of opportunity structures, as scenes settle within regions they have become attractive to a great many participants whose profile does not match the privileged status of forebears.

The child of a complex global cosmopolitanism, psytrance appears to have been elusive even for those who nominate the word "trance" as the key focus of their investigations of EDMC. The diverse cultural and musicological experiments native to psytrance contextualise both conflict and alliance, and concomitant processes of distinction and compromise between aesthetic stakeholders who invest in differing stylistic sensibilities. Such processes are notoriously difficult to capture given the accelerated pace of exchange and the dispersal of this transnational network, over which no single observer could possibly hold a commanding view. Thus, this textual symposium in which researcher/participants venture into the regional and global terrain of psytrance is advantageous to a developing field. This is the first volume dedicated to psytrance (let alone one which attempts to deconstruct its complex transnationalism). With a dozen chapters considering sites of psytrance emergence, production and performance in Goa, the UK, Israel, the US, Italy, Portugal, Czech Republic, Japan, Australia and elsewhere, the volume's contributors explore iterated ephemeralities, utopian dancescapes, nonsensical logics, ambivalent reactions, contested liminalities and contradictory responses to local and global conditions. From various regional, methodological, disciplinary and heuristic vantage points, they unpack the *local scenes and the global culture of psytrance*. And as they survey an EDM cultural phenomenon possessing geographical and cosmopolitan vectors, underground aesthetics and transnational flows, transgressive carnality and mediated virtuality, their cartographical, historical, anthropological and literary interventions evoke the concept of "scene", which as David Hesmondalgh (2005) has explained, has been a source of much confusion within popular music studies given its common usage to add conceptual leverage either to bounded places around which localised historical musical communities mobilise or complex flows of industries and styles across vast spaces in which diverse populations become networked. It has long proven difficult to imagine the coincident trajectories of these localised and global processes, yet this is what Will Straw (1991) attempted in his original articulation, a theme he would revisit a decade later in a useful update on the continuing ambiguity of "scene" when he wrote that "'scene' seems to be able to evoke both the cozy intimacy of community and the fluid cosmopolitanism of urban life. To the former, it adds a sense of dynamism; to the latter, a recognition of the inner circles and weighty histories which give each seemingly fluid surface a secret order" (Straw 2002: 248). Studies in popular music culture subsequent to the recognition of this dynamic have been configured through developments, for instance, in the understanding of cultural globalisation (e.g. Appadurai

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1990; Featherstone, Lash and Robertson 1995), postmodernism (see Lash 1990; McRobbie 1994), and cosmopolitanism (Hopper 2007).

Such interpenetrating orders of experience have inspired popular music scholars who have approached their subjects across this dynamic (see Bennett 2000; Bennett and Peterson 2004; Baulch 2007; Kahn Harris 2007; Rivera et al. 2009). And while there are studies of local translations and transformations of style, notably hip-hop (see Mitchell 1996, 2001; Foreman 2002), and the translocal character of music and club cultures (see Carrington and Wilson 2002), the transnationalism of EDMCs has been under-investigated (cf. Rietveld 1998). Apart from the near absence of studies of EDM translocality, this collection is born amid the paucity of studies of psytrance itself. Goa trance culture is given considerable attention in two recent ethnographies (D'Andrea 2007; Saldanha 2007), the former exploring the careers of "expressive expatriots" across Ibiza and Goa (see also D'Andrea 2004, 2006), the latter a Deleuzian materialist study of race investigating the "viscosity" of "whiteness" in the party scene in Goa from the late 1990s (see also Saldanha 2002, 2004, 2005). Also important is the formative account of the "spiritual hedonism" of Goa trance produced by Erik Davis (2004), an early ethnomusicological commentary on Goa trance offered by Cole and Hannan (1997, and see Seb Chan's response—1998), and commentaries by Des Tramacchi on Australian psychedelic "doof" culture (2000, 2001). With regard to more identifiable psytrance (i.e. post-Goa) developments, alongside Taylor's chapter on New York's psytrance "little culture" included in his *Strange Sounds* (2001: 165–200), my own ethnographic and cultural historic work (St John 2004, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b, forthcoming), the study of alternative spirituality, raves and psytrance (Partridge 2006; Till 2009), and research on psytrance and virtuality (Elliott 2002; Greener and Hollands 2006), there are relevant MA dissertations circulating in self-published or online form (see Meadan 2001; McAteer 2002),[5] and a few ethnographic styled films and documentaries (e.g. Phonokol 1998; Rood and Kilmmer 2002; Lastlight Films 2003; Short 2006; Shalev 2008). In total, the research output on a phenomenon twenty years old is, therefore, quite small—albeit growing. While this is not the place to offer a detailed explanation for such paucity, it seems likely that sanctions (political, legal, academic) against controlled substance use associated with the field of research has had a prohibitive impact on state-sponsored research. This, combined with the secretive and understandably guarded nature of many participants, has made empirical research difficult for those not already "insiders" (i.e., those who are experienced, trusted, sensitive). Such "research" has tended to have been initiated in formative periods prior to the commencement of formal sponsored research. Ideally, research will also demonstrate a tendency towards maintaining critical distance. Most contributors to this volume are identifiable at the intersections of these patterns.

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Figure I.2 Ozora Festival 2009, Hungary, Main Floor. Photo by Alex Canazei: www.alexcanazei.com

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VOLUME OUTLINE

The volume is distributed across three sections. Part One, "Goa trance", begins with Luther Elliott tracing the emergence of the "state of mind" of Goa trance, a particular relationship between place, affect and musical commodities that has characterised the proliferation of psychedelic music scenes since the 1960s, an ephemeral "structure of feeling" transportable, in his focus, from San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, through Goa, to the world. In the following chapter, Anthony D'Andrea examines claims of "scene decline" in Goa. Excessive commercialisation, populism and surveillance certainly impacted Goa trance as experienced in northern Goa throughout the 1990s and into the present, but, as D'Andrea argues, claims of "decline" made throughout the presence of trance in Goa have been integral to the re/formation of psytrance. In a study of ongoing cultural practice within the context of complex globalisation, the chapter is instructive to understanding tactics within psytrance in the places of its emergence globally. In the final chapter in this section, Arun Saldanha approaches similar territory by asking "what happens when the mother scene of a global cultural genre dies?" He argues that it was the success of Goa trance in commodifying itself which brought about the demise of the scene in Goa. In a retrospective Derridean deconstruction of Goa trance, its origins, development and cosmic rebirth, Saldanha

adopts the ethical metaphor of the "ghost" to contend that "death" both haunts and revitalises.

In Part Two, the transition from "Goa trance" to global "psytrance" is explored as the latter flourished in many parts of the world. Hillegonda Rietveld opens this section with her detailed exploration of Goa/psytrance as "a cosmopolitan emotional response to global information capitalism". As a framework for a wide range of user-groups affected by global information and communication technologies, psytrance is figured as a complex cosmopolitan experience which is examined in relationship to sites and scenes in Goa, the UK, the US, Germany and Japan. Unpacking this cosmopolitanism through an ethnomusicological discursis which uncovers layers of influence through cross-Atlantic EDM scenes, psytrance emerges as a story of interpenetrating musical and cultural crosscurrents. One country (and city) integral in these global crosscurrents was (and remains) the UK (and London). Charles de Ledesma's tour through psychedelic trance music production in the UK draws on interviews with some of the key figures in this scene centering around London, and uses Deleuze and Guattari (especially the "rhizome") to make sense of the emergence, growth and the circularity of UK psytrance. Robin Lindop follows with an evaluation of psytrance as a music genre in the UK, concluding that it is simultaneously homogeneous (an "actual" genre) and diverse (a "meta" genre). Lindop uncovers a set of production techniques, a process he calls "psychedelicisation" which enables psytrance to appropriate and negotiate other music styles, an understanding which informs his observations of tensions around psytrance at several UK EDM festivals. Joshua I. Schmidt completes this section with his examination of the evidence of paradox he traces through another key international psytrance node—Israel. The principal contradiction he states is that while making countercultural gestures, the behavior of *transistim* (Israeli trancers) actually replicates the culture of late-modern, post-Zionist Israel.

In Part Three, "Liminal Culture", the volume shifts towards an exploration of psytrance scenes in national locations generally removed from (albeit intimately connected with) initial sites of Goa trance emergence, with contributions offering special dedication to the spaces of psytrance performance (co-present and virtual). Botond Vitos' ethnography of Czech psytrance parties reveals a community "impregnated with a peculiar sort of psychedelic humour". Apparent in a variety of communications, Vitos investigates a ritualised madness, or *demence*, which is associated with psychedelic drug use at these parties, and which "accomplishes the temporary demolition and perversion of cultural systems". Vitos makes sense of this nonsensical logic and demented aesthetic with the assistance of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and grotesque realism. The "madness" continues as we turn to Tuscany, Italy, to the mountaintop site of a party co-organised by Chiara Baldini, who draws on Euripides' *The Bacchae*, and the cult of Dionysus, to offer explanation for ambivalence in the reaction to the local insurgence of

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the "ecstatic experience". The utopian yet contested space of the party is so often made possible through the communication and networking capacities of the Internet. Indeed Jenny Ryan explores the shared history of psytrance and the Internet which she argues is rooted in utopian visions of an interconnected global "tribal" community. Ryan explains how, with its demographic base centred around the San Francisco Bay Area, the online social networking site Tribe.net enables access to this "underground". The Internet is not only critical to the cosmopolitan character of psytrance transnationalism, but is integral to the formation of local psy-communities. Shifting our attention to the Australian (Melbourne) psytrance scene, Alex Lambert suggests the local psytrance community moves between two primary social "places": bush parties known as "doofs" and online discussion forums. Investigating how online communities facilitate representational narratives of the temporary party, Lambert contends that the discussion forum Oztrance prolongs the social temporality and influences the cultural significance of doofs. One of the outcomes of this research is the recognition that psytrance constitutes co-present and virtual spatial complexity. Serving as an anchor to the volume, my chapter charts this complex transformational experience with particular ethnographic attention to large psytrance festivals in three different countries (Italy, Australia and Portugal). Exploring the *liminal culture* of psytrance, the chapter accounts for the way a super-abundant festal life enervates the transitional lifestyles of psytrance participants. But, unlike the conventions of passage rites, the psytrance festival is reported to be a sophisticated realm, evocative of the complexities of the counterculture to which it is indebted. As a domain of excessive carnivalesque and conscious ritualising the festival provides the performative staging ground for diverse sacrificial logics and concomitant ideas of the sacred. If psytrance is transformative then this needs to be considered within the context of a complex cultural movement.

In the local sites of performance, transnational formations and cultural tensions conveyed in the following chapters, this volume thus offers an introduction to the emergent field of psytrance studies.

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NOTES

1. While these marketing labels are sometimes capitalised, here, and throughout this volume, this inconsistent convention will not be observed.
2. See Kodwo Eshun (1998: 09[161]) for a discussion of Sun Ra, for instance.
3. They also state that "we encourage everyone to advance their consciousness through legal means, but we also encourage our community to become involved in their national societies in advancing the cause of a more rational and sane drug policy around the world, in every nation. We encourage dancers and trancers to support such drug policy and education organizations as MAPS, Drug Policy Alliance, and Erowid". http://www.chilluminati.org/ (accessed 19 May 2009).

4. See Jake Stephenson's profile on Discogs: <http://www.discogs.com/artist/Jake+Stephenson> (accessed 21 June 2009).
5. I only list English language research publications here.

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